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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIRUT 001965

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KCRM](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: MGLE01: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT OF LEBANESE ACTING
INTERIOR MINISTER AHMAD FATFAT

REF: BEIRUT 1515

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Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman. Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) The visit of Acting Interior Minister Ahmad Fatfat offers the opportunity to press U.S. security interests in Lebanon: counterterrorism including Sunni extremism, Syrian influence, Palestinian weapons inside and outside the refugee camps, and arms smuggling into Lebanon. We have begun major assistance to Lebanon's Internal Security Forces, which operate under Acting Minister Fatfat's authority. Fatfat's June 17-21 visit to Washington comes after the recent visits to Washington of General Achraf Rifi, Commander of the Internal Security Forces, and General Wafiz Jazini, head of the Surete Generale and who also reports to Fatfat. Acting Minister Fatfat would like to follow up issues discussed during the Rifi and Jazini visits. These issues, in addition to our priorities noted above, would include law enforcement assistance, deployment of Lebanese security forces to southern Lebanon, and enhanced control of Lebanon's borders. End Summary.

BACKGROUND TO VISIT

2. (C) Ahmad Fatfat's visit was prompted by an agreement between the President and Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, when they met at the White House in April, that Lebanon's two principal security ministers should make a joint visit to Washington for discussions on U.S.-Lebanon security cooperation. Fatfat was thus to travel to Washington with Lebanon's Defense Minister Elias Murr. Our objective was to promote better coordination between Fatfat and Murr on their overlapping security activities. But Murr has deferred his travel to late July, based in part on medical treatments that follow from his near-assassination by a car bomb in July 2005. Murr and Fatfat also argue that, in the tense environment, they cannot both be absent from Lebanon simultaneously, an assessment Prime Minister Siniora

shares. Acting Minister Fatafat's visit comes after high level Lebanese visits to Washington by, in addition to Prime Minister Siniora and part of his cabinet, Druse leader Walid Jumblatt (in February), and (late last year) Parliamentary Majority leader Saad Hariri.

FATFAT'S RECORD

13. (C) Ahmad Fatafat was first elected to the Lebanese Parliament in 1996. He was re-elected in 2000 and 2005, in each instance representing the Dinniyah region of northern Lebanon. He is 52, a medical doctor by training, and the son of a former member of Parliament. He is close to parliamentary majority leader Saad Hariri, the son of slain former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. When the 2005 "Cedar Revolution" in Lebanon brought to power, in May-June elections, a new anti-Syrian majority, Ahmad Fatafat was selected as Minister of Youth and Sports. He took on the additional responsibilities of the Interior Ministry in February 2006, when the then Minister of the Interior, Hassan Sabaa, resigned over the poor performance of Lebanon's Internal Security Services during anti-Danish riots that damaged a Christian neighborhood in Beirut. Fatafat was appointed Acting Minister of the Interior at that time, but has never been confirmed by Parliament and the President. The reason is that severe differences between Lebanon's Prime Minister Siniora and President Emile Lahoud would preclude Lahoud assenting to any Siniora appointment. As a result, Fatafat will remain "Acting" Interior Minister indefinitely (while retaining his Minister of Youth and Sports portfolio as well). He should be addressed as "Mr. Minister."

TERRORISM AND NORTHERN LEBANON

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14. (C) Fatafat's home area of northern Lebanon is marked by two subjects of interest to us. First is the presence of Sunni extremists who may be receiving increased amounts of money from Iran. Second is the region's close ties to Syria through trade, a Syrian intelligence presence, and family ties. Fatafat should be drawn out on these two subjects. The Sunni rioters who in February trashed the Christian neighborhood of Achrafieh, ostensibly in protest over the Danish cartoons, came mostly from Fatafat's region of northern Lebanon. Last year, as part of an amnesty arrangement, the Lebanese security authorities released from prison up to 100 "Dinniyah" terrorists who in 2000 had killed 11 people, including several members of the Lebanese Armed Forces. Fatafat has told us privately that these accused terrorists were framed by the Syrians in a Syrian effort to curry favor with the U.S. In January 2006, the Lebanese security services arrested up to 11 members of an alleged al-Qaeda ring, the first such al-Qaeda arrests ever in Lebanon. They included Saudis, Palestinians, and up to several Lebanese. They were arrested in northern Lebanon.

15. (C) Syrian influence is probably greater in northern Lebanon than other areas of the country. The Syrian connection stems from the open terrain between northern Lebanon and the Syrian coastline, longstanding commercial and business contacts, and frequent movement of Lebanese and Syrians across this relatively open border area. Many of the most pro-Syrian Lebanese politicians come from this area. To one degree or another of pro-Syrian sympathy, these politicians would include former Prime Minister (2004-05) Omar Karame, interim Prime Minister (2005) Najib Mikati, former deputy Prime Minister (2000-05) Issam Fares, and former Interior Minister (2004-05) and Christian clan leader Suleiman Franjeh. None share affinity for Fatafat's own Hariri-led March 14 coalition. We hear recurrent stories of continued Syrian influence in northern Lebanon that is relatively stronger than elsewhere in the country. It would be useful to explore with Fatafat his perspective on Syria's

now-covert efforts to exert influence in Lebanon, which is of course at odds with UNSCR 1559, adopted in September 2004 and calling for a sovereign, politically independent Lebanon.

PALESTINIAN ARMS AND HIZBALLAH

¶6. (C) UNSCR 1559 had also included a call for disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. The reference to Lebanese militias centers on Hizballah, while the non-Lebanese militias comprise Palestinian rejectionist groups such as the PFLP-GC and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. The rejectionists are Syrian-supported and operate from bases outside the 14 Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. The Lebanese have taken up the Palestinian militia issue in the "National Dialogue," a 14-member round table of leading politicians from the country's major confessional groups. The National Dialogue began meeting in February 2006. It concluded unanimously that the Lebanese need to come up with a way to to disarm the Palestinians outside the refugee camps, within six months. The National Dialogue also agreed to come up with a way to control the arms and security inside the camps. While these words are welcome and indicate for the first time a Lebanese consensus regarding a deeply destabilizing and dangerous part of the Lebanese scene, Fatfat might be asked just how the government plans to implement these conclusions of the National Dialogue. The well-known Lebanese participants in the National Dialogue deserve credit for addressing the issue seriously, but words must be followed by action. On May 28, rockets launched from Hizballah-controlled areas north of the Blue Line struck a military base in northern Israel. The ensuing events that day were the heaviest military clashes in the area since Israel's April 2000 withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

¶7. (C) Arms smuggling into Lebanon, primarily from Syria, is related to the issues of terrorism and the Palestinian rejectionist groups. A truckload of arms, presumably destined for Hizballah, was discovered by the Lebanese Armed Forces two months ago. The arms were permitted to pass, raising questions about the role and responsibilities of the

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Lebanese Armed Forces. Although this shipment bore on the action of the Lebanese Armed Forces (which are under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Defense rather than the Minister of the Interior), the incident raised a domestic debate about the kinds of weapons that are entering Lebanon outside the authority of the government. It would be useful to ask Acting Minister Fatfat for his impressions on the extent of arms smuggling, to whom the arms are going, and the scope of existing stockpiles of arms, especially those held by the Palestinian rejectionist groups.

¶8. (C) Acting Minister Fatfat, as a Sunni, is unlikely to sympathize with Hizballah retaining its arms for the indefinite future. Reftel describes the complex role of Hizballah in Lebanese domestic politics. The National Dialogue has taken up the question of Hizballah's arms and the broader questions of Lebanon's proper national security strategy. These debates are unresolved, but there is a real Lebanese process that we hope can register progress soon. A spirited debate in the last session of the National Dialogue, on June 8, fully engaged the question of whether Hizballah's arms can ever be consistent with the concept of the state as the final authority in Lebanon with a monopoly on the means of force. Our support for the Dialogue reassures the Lebanese population, currently deeply divided, that we are not promoting implementation of UNSCR 1559, with its disarmament provisions, by means that would destabilize Lebanon in the process. Where we are firm, however, is that UNSCR 1559 must be implemented at a future time, and that real steps must be taken incrementally toward this end. Acting Minister Fatfat can be asked how he sees the disarmament debate proceeding, and what role the Internal Security Forces would play in the disarmament process, as the

end outcome is clearly defined in UNSCR 1559.

U.S.-LEBANESE SECURITY COOPERATION

18. (C) We have responded to the dramatic changes that have taken place in Lebanon since March 2005 by committing the USG to greatly enhanced security cooperation. We have launched programs led by the FBI (USD one million in training and USD 1.3 million in laboratory equipment), the Department of State (anti-terrorism assistance), and the Department of Defense through expanded training and equipment for the Lebanese Armed Forces. These programs were a focus of this month's visit to Washington by General Achraf Rifi, Director General of the Internal Security Forces (ISF). Acting Minister Fatfat told us that he views his visit in large part as a follow-up to General Rifi's visit. We are concerned that our assistance be used to maximum advantage. A prime goal for us, and for our allies and friends who are also providing security help, is better coordination among Lebanon's principal security institutions: the Internal Security Forces and the Surete Generale which are under the authority of Acting Minister Fatfat, and the Lebanese Armed Forces which is under the authority of Defense Minister Murr. For programs that we provide, such as crime scene investigation, bomb blast analysis, forensic analysis, and enhanced border controls, we want to ensure that Lebanon's security institutions are cooperating, rather than competing. Each institution is dominated by a particular confession; the ISF is largely Sunni, the Surete Generale is Shi'a, and the Lebanese Armed Forces are Christian.

19. (C) Acting Minister Fatfat should be asked about ISF and Surete Generale needs and priorities. We are already working closely with our Western partners to exchange information on what each is doing for the Lebanese. One challenge for us is that the Lebanese have not delivered a comprehensive plan of action, or list of priority needs. We are also concerned that the three security institutions, especially the ISF and Lebanese Armed Forces, compete with each other and overlap in areas such as intelligence and counterterrorism. Acting Minister Fatfat should be asked about how he coordinates with Defense Minister Murr. One area of special interest for us is Lebanese security deployment in the Hizballah-dominated south. We are urging the Lebanese to bring up to its full 1,000 troop complement their Joint Security Forces (ISF and

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Lebanese Armed Forces) unit in the south. This unit responds to the UNSCR 1559 support for the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory. Most broadly, U.S. officials can remind the Acting Minister that our continuing ability to provide security assistance will be a function of how well this assistance is used.

U.S. CITIZEN CHILD CUSTODY CASE

110. (C) For the past several years, a U.S. citizen child, Kelsey Klotz, has been held by her American citizen mother and Lebanese stepfather in a Hizballah-controlled area of the northern Biqa' Valley. There are standing U.S. and Lebanese court orders that this child be returned to her U.S. citizen father who resides in the U.S. Despite the court orders, Lebanese authorities, and principally the ISF, have been unable to recover the child and thus facilitate her return to the U.S. We have raised this case at the highest levels in Lebanon and at Cabinet-level by U.S. officials. The child remains outside the effective ability of the Lebanese government to enforce its own judicial decisions. It would be useful to remind the Acting Minister that the Kelsey Klotz child custody case is of highest importance to us, and that every effort must be made to ensure Kelsey Klotz's return to her father in the U.S.

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